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Statement delivered to the Fourth Committee of

the United Nations General Assembly

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Mr. Chairman, distinguished delegates:

Four years have passed since the government of Indonesia began its armed intervention in East Timor in October 1975, four years of terror, massacre and starvation. On 7 December 1975, Indonesia extended its intervention to a full-scale invasion of the territory, capturing the capital city of Dili. This act of aggression was immediately condemned by the United Nations. On 12 December 1975 the General Assembly adopted resolution 3485 which "strongly deplores the military intervention of the armed forces of Indonesia in Portuguese Timor" and "calls upon the Government of Indonesia to desist from further violation of the territorial integrity of Portuguese Timor and to withdraw without delay its armed forces from the Territory in order to enable the people of the Territory freely to exercise their right to self-determination and independence." These demands have frequently been reiterated since, most recently, in a resolution of 13 December 1978. The regular response of the government of Indonesia has been to intensify its aggression, with mounting atrocities. The United States and other Western powers have continued to provide the military and diplomatic support that Indonesia requires to persist in its attempt to subdue the population of East Timor.

In December 1978, immediately after the UN appeal for withdrawal of its armed forces, Indonesia launched new military attacks in East Timor. Indonesian Defense Minister General Mohammad Jusuf claimed that 1200 Fretilin troops were killed in a single Indonesian attack on Christmas day. Previously, Indonesia had claimed that Fretilin had been reduced to a few hundred scattered guerrillas. Fretilin President Nicolau Lobato was killed a few days later. According to letters from Timor, members of his family in Indonesian custody were executed. Lobato was killed in an operation involving troops transferred from place to place by helicopter, the Indonesian press reports, while refugees who escaped to Portugal at the time say that bombing continued in the interior. In April 1979 the Indonesian press reported that Defense Minister Jusuf visited troops "at the front," not far from Dili. Other reports also indicate that fighting continues at a level that is difficult to determine, given the barriers to investigation imposed by the Indonesian military.[1]

For the same reason, it is difficult to estimate precisely the human cost of the continued fighting, the Indonesian tactics of crop destruction and forced population removal, and other atrocities. A year ago, an Indonesian official privately admitted that more than 100,000 people had died in the territory because of the war, adding that hundreds of villages had been "wiped off the face of the earth" in the bombing. Citing this statement, an analysis of the situation by the Legislative Research Service of the Australian Parliament concluded that "On the basis of many reports of this nature, there can no longer be any doubt about the bloody and brutal nature" of the Indonesian aggression.[2]

Statistics provided by the Indonesian government are still more startling. An October 1978 census reported by the Assistant of Defense and Security in East Timor estimated the total population of the territory at about 330,000. The same source estimated the population of displaced persons at almost 320,000. Most of these victims had been living for 2-3 years in "centers" that have been described as "concentration camps" or "prisons." In 1974, prior to the Indonesian invasion, the population had been estimated at about 690,000 by the Diocese of Dili.[3] If we can believe the figures provided by the Indonesian government, more than half the population may have disappeared as a consequence of the Indonesian invasion, some 360,000 people, while virtually all the

survivors are refugees. Commenting on these figures, James Dunn observes that "It is certainly very hard to believe that the population of the territory may have been halved in three-and-a-half years. But even if 100,000 Timorese escaped the attention of the authorities, the loss of life would still be at an appallingly high level."[4]

Another study prepared by the Foreign Affairs group of the Australian Parliament Legislative Research Service in September 1979 cites a "sensitively-placed Indonesian official" who confided to UN officials in December 1978 "that the military authorities had spoken of a population assessment of 'about 400,000 Timorese'."[5] If accurate, his assessment again indicates that well over 200,000 people have died. Recent testimony by a Portuguese priest, Father Leoneto Vieira de Rego, supports such assessments. Father de Rego spent three years in the mountains with Fretilin before surrendering to Indonesian forces in January 1979, suffering from malaria and starvation. After imprisonment and interrogation, he was permitted to return to Portugal in June. Father de Rego reports that in the region around his village, probably one third of the population had died, most of them from hunger, which became a serious problem in late 1977 as a result of the intensification of Indonesian attacks at that time. From August 1977, Indonesian "search and destroy" operations forced the population to flee from one area to another, unable to grow or harvest crops, while Indonesian authorities herded surrendering villagers into internment camps where, Father de Rego alleged, the problem of hunger was further aggravated. He said that the fierce offensives of 1978 extended Indonesian military control, though armed resistance to the occupation was continuous throughout the country. He added that "the East Timorese will never accept the occupation, and I think resistance will grow again. Indonesian control is not secure anywhere." He then added significantly that he did not believe that East Timorese independence is a lost cause: "We still have hope as long as the United Nations doesn't accept Indonesia's annexation. An authority is needed which can force the retirement of Indonesian troops from Timor."[6]

The United Nations has a grave responsibility in this regard.

Other church sources add confirming evidence. A church report that reached Australia in July 1979 states that "an increasing death toll seems to be a phenomenon all over the villages of East Timor." In refugee camps the death rate is so high that Timorese are heard to say that "the more refugees, the more corpses." In one camp, people were dying at a rate of 300 a month early this year.[7] In this camp, according to a Timorese refugee now in Melbourne, the Indonesian army and local district chief "run a monopoly of the coffee trade, the Timorese must sell to them. If they try to travel to Dili to market their coffee, they are arrested and sent back." The camp residents confined to these centers "work for the army with no pay." "It is quite false," he adds, "to speak of the Timorese people in the displaced person centres as refugees. A good many of them were ordered into these centres by the military..."[8]

The July 1979 report of the Australian Council for Overseas Aid provides additional evidence on the starvation and suffering within the areas controlled by Indonesian armed force, specifically, among those who have been driven into internment centers in counterinsurgency operations. The report also quotes a senior Indonesian official as saying that "there is massive corruption associated with aid." It quotes letters smuggled from Timor which allege that aid supplies are being sold by the Indonesian army and the Indonesian Red Cross. Medicines and other aid sent from Australia and New Zealand are on sale in Dili at prices few can afford, while the hospital is "notoriously short of medicines" and people are starving and dying of disease.[9] The situation in areas still under direct Indonesian attack is surely still more grim.

Mr. Chairman, distinguished delegates:

I quoted Father de Rego's appeal to the United Nations as an authority that might be able to terminate Indonesian aggression. Apparently, the United States government shared this assessment. UN Ambassador Daniel P. Moynihan, in his recently published memoirs of his term at the United Nations, has the following to say with regard to Indonesian success in Timor: "...the United States wished things to turn out as they did, and worked to bring this about. The Department of State desired that the United Nations prove utterly ineffective in whatever measures it undertook. This task was given to me, and I carried it forward with no inconsiderable success."[10] Ambassador Moynihan was presumably aware of the nature of his "success" in preventing effective action to impede Indonesian aggression. He cites a February 1976 estimate by the deputy chairman of the provisional government installed by Indonesian force "that some sixty thousand persons had been killed since the outbreak of civil war...10 percent of the population, almost the proportion of casualties experienced by the Soviet Union during the Second World War." He failed to add that at most a few thousand were killed during the civil war which ended in September 1975 with a Fretilin victory. Thus in effect he is claiming credit for "success" in helping to cause a massacre of some 10 percent of the population by February 1976, a feat that he compares to the consequences of Nazi aggression -- not to speak of the far larger numbers of victims in the subsequent period.

Ambassador Moynihan also comments that the Indonesian invasion must have been successful by March 1976, since "the subject disappeared from the press and from the United Nations after that time." It did virtually disappear from the press, though not from the United Nations. The curtain of silence drawn by the press in the United States and much of the West hardly demonstrates the success of Indonesian arms, though it does stand as a remarkable testimonial to the effectiveness of Western propaganda systems.

There is little doubt that the United States government was aware of the impending Indonesian invasion in 1975. Furthermore, it continued to provide the material support required by the Indonesian military forces, 90%-armed by the United States at the time of the invasion. Contrary to false testimony by government witnesses at Congressional Hearings, new offers of arms were made immediately after the invasion. Then, and since, the flow of arms has been uninterrupted, including attack helicopters and other equipment required to "wipe hundreds of villages off the face of the earth," destroy crops, and herd the remnants of the population into internment centers, where they subsist under the conditions already noted. Since the Indonesian invasion, the US has granted Indonesia over $178 million in military aid alone.[11] This aid was crucial in enabling the Indonesian army to carry out the brutal military escalation of late 1977, when it was running short of supplies. Other Western powers have also sought to provide the needed armaments, a profitable business conducted with little concern for the vast human cost.

Some Timorese have been able to escape to Portugal or Australia, in many cases, they charge, after paying bribes of thousands of dollars to Indonesian officials.[12] Within East Timor, many are imprisoned, and reports and letters make frequent reference to the "disappearance" of people, which Timorese assume means death. A letter of 14 July 1979 states that "Many people have already disappeared...Now many widows of the recently disappeared walk around in a very disturbed state, as thin as skeletons." The letter is cited in an Action for World Development Dossier submitted to the ICRC, which adds that "people who surrendered under the Presidential Amnesty which expired on Dec. 31 1977, have

also disappeared." It notes "disturbing reports" of torture and brainwashing in prisons, execution without trial, and other atrocities and repression.[13] According to reliable sources, the Indonesian armed forces are following a policy of taking no prisoners and are executing people with close ties to Fretilin, including their families.

Mr. Chairman, distinguished delegates:

The September 1979 report of the Australian Parliament Legislative Research Service cites a "well-informed source" who estimates that an additional 20-40,000 Timorese will die even if relief is forthcoming, given the conditions in the country. The same report notes "the persistent refusal of those countries that normally champion human rights to examine, let alone accept, the steady flow of evidence that a tragedy of far greater proportions than was at first believed has been endured" by the Timorese. "Thus no single nation has sought to bring any significant pressure to bear on Indonesia, the power largely responsible for what must be one of the most flagrant denials of human rights in the history of modern decolonization."[14] In dramatic confirmation of this conclusion, the 1979 Human Rights report of the State Department, in keeping with earlier practice, avoids any discussion of the actual Indonesian record in East Timor, stating that "The Indonesian Government has been criticized for its initial military occupation of East Timor," and adding that the U.S. Government seeks to encourage Indonesia "to expand its programs of assistance to the people of East Timor."[15] The Human Rights report is silent on the actual nature of this "assistance" since 1975, and on the crucial U.S. responsibility for the atrocities that are concealed by the government and the press.[16]

The Australian report of September 1979 concludes, surely credibly, that "it seems beyond doubt that most of the deaths since December 1975, and the present poor physical condition of the Timorese, are the grim consequences of the deliberate Indonesian strategy designed to starve Fretilin and its supporters into surrender." The report might have gone on to say that it is also quite beyond doubt that these were the direct and predictable consequences of the policies adopted by the Western powers throughout this period. The report quotes "one of the more perceptive observers" as saying that "The Indonesians tried to starve Fretilin into submission, and in the process succeeded in starving tens of thousands of Timorese to death." The figures already cited suggest that this is a cautious estimate. The report estimates that tens of thousands of Timorese would flee abroad if they were able to do so, but "the Indonesian authorities are determined to prevent the kind of exodus that would attract international attention." It concludes finally that "The world's conscience has been appropriately shocked by the ordeals of the 'boat people', and by the reports of enormous loss of life and suffering in Kampuchea, yet scant attention has been given to the humanitarian consequences of Indonesia's forced integration of East Timor which seems to be assuming the proportions of genocide. The case of East Timor presents, in relative terms, the most serious case of abuse of human rights, not to mention the right of self-determination, ever to have been inflicted on a people, in the crude guise of integration."

Defenders of the Indonesian invasion occasionally argue that the grim fate of the Timorese is a residue of four centuries of Portuguese colonial rule. In this connection, it is worth noting the observation of the very well-informed director of the Foreign Affairs Group of the Australian Parliament Legislative Research Service, Mr. James Dunn, formerly Australian consul in East Timor: "In fact in the last years of Portuguese rule food supplies were generally adequate in all parts of East Timor although, as in the case of neighbouring Indonesian islands, famine conditions occurred from time to time in certain districts."[17]

This effort to project the current situation backwards in time recalls the comparable attempt by Ambassador Moynihan and many others to attribute the massacres by the Indonesian army to the civil war of August-September 1975.

Mr. Chairman, distinguished delegates:

Unless large-scale international aid is quickly provided, with adequate supervision to ensure that it is actually distributed where needed, the toll of death and suffering in Timor, already awesome, will continue to climb. The United Nations must act, forthrightly and effectively, to ensure that humanitarian aid is dispatched at a significant level and with adequate controls. And beyond that, it should, I feel, heed the appeal by Father de Rego and others who are able to speak out. Despite the cynicism of the great powers, the Timorese people are not inevitably doomed to near total destruction, and their courageous struggle for national independence is not a lost cause. The United Nations still has the opportunity to play a crucial role in ensuring their survival, and helping them to realize their right to self-determination.

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Footnotes

[1]AFP, 2 August 1979 (FBIS, 3 August 1979, Indonesia, N3); J.S. Dunn, "Notes on the Current Situation in East Timor," 6 April 1979, and "EAST TIMOR - Notes on the Humanitarian Situation," 26 September 1979, reports of the Legislative Research Service, Parliament of Australia; Arnold Kohen and John Taylor, An Act of Genocide: Indonesia's Invasion of East Timor, TAPOL (UK), London, 1979, p. 59.

[2]Dunn, "Notes on the Current Situation in East Timor."

[3]Aid and East Timor, report adopted by the Australian Council for Overseas Aid (ACFOA), July 1979.

[4]Age (Melbourne), 31 July 1979.

[5]J.S. Dunn, "EAST TIMOR - Notes on the Humanitarian Situation."

[6]Guardian (London), 20 August 1979; Observer (London), 26 August 1979; Australian, 21 August 1979; Star (Darwin) 13 August 1979.

[7]Age, 31 July 1979; ACFOA report.

[8]Age, 7 September 1979.

[9]ACFOA report; Age, 2 August 1979.

[10]Daniel Patrick Moynihan, A Dangerous Place, Little Brown and Company, Boston, 1978, p. 247.

[11]Cited in a memo by Bruce P. Cameron, Foreign Policy Director, ADA, to Members of the U.S. House of Representatives, 4 September 1979.

[12]Age, 15 January 1979, 20 June 1979; Times (Canberra), 1 June 1979.

[13]Dossier on East Timor for the International Committee of the Red Cross, prepared by Action for World Development, Fitzroy, Victoria, Australia, September 1979.

[14]J.S. Dunn, "EAST TIMOR - Notes on the Humanitarian Situation."

[15]Report on Human Rights Practices in Countries Receiving U.S. Aid, submitted to the Committee on Foreign Relations, U.S. Senate, and Committee on Foreign Affairs, U.S. House of Representatives, 96th Congress, 1st session, by the Department of State, February 8 1979.

[16]For detailed documentation on the role of the media in suppressing and distorting the facts, in conformity with U.S. government policy, see my testimony before this committee, Document A/C.4/33/7/Add.3, November 1978. For much additional documentation on these matters, see N. Chomsky and E.S. Herman, The Political Economy of Human Rights, volume one, pp. 129-204, South End Press, Boston, 1979.

[17]"Notes on the Current Situation in East Timor."